



<b>Session Title</b>	Moving from inclusion to empowerment: Building financial agency for women in a post-COVID-19 environment
<b>Day &amp; Date</b>	Thursday, 14 <sup>th</sup> May 2020
<b>Time</b>	5 pm to 7 pm (IST)
<b>Format</b>	Panel Discussion
<b>Panelists</b>	P. Satish (Executive Director, Sa-Dhan)  Devika Mahadevan (Head, Strategy & Communication, Mann Deshi Foundation)  Jayshree Vyas (MD, SEWA Bank)  Joby CO (CEO, Dvara KGFS)
<b>Moderator</b>	Aarti Mohan (Co-founder, Head – Knowledge Practice, Sattva Consulting)

## Key Discussion Points:

- Organisations working with and helping to fund women (cooperatives, NGOs, etc.) need to be supported during this period. However, these organisations are often small, and larger organisations attract more funding and clients. Policymakers need to focus on supporting organisations helping women, else fund flow for women entrepreneurs dries up entirely.
- Gendered approaches to products, solutions, and interventions are required; a gender-neutral approach does not look at the control of finance within a household.
- There has to be a greater focus on digital. In some cases, women can access phones owned by their husbands or sons, but even in situations where digital literacy or access to smartphones is a gap, digital can be leveraged through communication like voice messages, community radio, etc.
- A move to digital platforms does not mean you move away from collective models like SHGs and JLGs because of COVID. There's a great value in collectives- for relationship building, business opportunities, advice, solidarity, networking. There can be ways to make collectives virtual- such as getting a women's collective on a call together. Digital touch-points can be created.
- Focusing on asset creation for women can be greatly beneficial. There are still major barriers here, e.g. ownership of land is in the name of husband, in-laws etc. However, there is an acknowledgement that women that have been able to cultivate assets for themselves find it easier to pivot to some other non-perishable business, as they are considered more credit-worthy by lending institutions.
- The Govt. needs to work with banking platforms/institutions (like SEWA Bank, Mann Deshi, etc.) to bring women borrowers into the fold. Else, government schemes don't reach these women borrowers. Bank accounts need to be reoperationalised and this can only happen with support from the centre.
- Digital and financial fluency are crucial, training has to be holistic; and capital/credit needs to be provided to women enterprises (e.g. a credit line for street vendors) for them to stay on their feet. Vernacular voice content can solve literacy gaps as well. Financial inclusion is only possible when it's sustainable, and that comes from the creation of financial and functional literacy.
- **Top priorities to tackle, preserve, consolidate and expand gender and financial agency in the post-COVID world:**
  - a. Importance of organisations coming together to work closely with women. Such organisations need to be expanded and strengthened, and funding is required for that; requires policy-financial support from the government and institutions like NABARD.
  - b. Emphasis has to be supporting women to continue the business, earning incomes, livelihoods whether it is in emergency loans, credit lines, and providing them with advisory/ financial counselling on what would be best-suited products for them. There needs to be gender intentionality in these products.
  - c. Emphasis on digital buying. Buying online is now a habit and so, for business all physical paper and cash is a cost driver and if you remove paper and cash in the process then it can drop delivery costs at the last mile. Further, intermediaries can be removed. Market intermediation and its layers will be reduced, supply chains will now be straighter and the suppliers/producers will get a larger chunk of the pie.
  - d. Women in this period will understand the value of money and will spend less. This is an opportunity for us to spread awareness of economic platforms as women will now be more accepting of online/digital platforms.